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## BRIEF NOTES ON THE INDEBTEDNESS OF SPIELHAGEN TO DICKENS.

Few English authors, if we except Walter Scott, have exerted more influence upon German novelists of the last century than Charles Dickens. Traces of this influence are frequent from 1840 on, and such writers as Alexander von Ungern Sternberg, Raabe, Freytag, and Reuter betray evidence of having come under its sway. The English author's interest in the plain man, his marked predilection for original and eccentric types, his hatred of the injustice inherent in all advantages and privileges accorded the nobility, his gentle and sympathetic humor have appealed strongly to the German nature at a period when with the rise of industrialism and social democracy the eyes of the world gradually became focussed upon the condition and problems of the proletariat.

Friedrich Spielhagen was ever an enthusiastic admirer of English writers—Shakespeare, Fielding, Smollet, Byron, Scott, and Thackeray—and admits that he owed a greater debt to them than to the French for his intellectual development. Dickens, too, was a favorite of his. Before any printed translation of *David Copperfield* had appeared, he even rendered large portions of "*das köstliche Buch*" into German for the delectation of a friend who was unable to enjoy it in the original. Somewhat later he composed an essay on Dickens which, however, has never been included in his collected works as it did not fully satisfy him. It was nevertheless, with some revisions, brought out in the journal "Europa." Throughout his autobiographical work *Finder und Erfinder* as well as in his collections of literary essays and criticisms, he frequently expresses his high regard for the English novelist. Dickens, Goethe, and "the author of *The Vicar of Wakefield*" he names as "*die Epiker von Gottes Gnaden*"; and *David Copperfield* is frequently cited as a model of what a novel should be.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Cf. *Beiträge zur Theorie und Technik des Romans*, 226-227; also 228, and 240; *Finder und Erfinder* I, 377, II, 395.

Apart from the question of the choice of the autobiographical form, a number of characters, themes, and certain stylistic devices in Spielhagen's *Ich-Roman Hammer und Amboss* are touched with the influence of the last named work. A particularly striking resemblance is that of the various girls with whom the young hero came into contact. The sequence as well as the number of real attachments is similar. First the beautiful Emily, whose desire for gaiety and life, whose longing to be a lady, overcame her better judgment and who ran away with the rich, handsome, and brilliant Steerforth only to wreck her life forever. David had loved her in a boyish way and felt her fate deeply. Then Dora, the sweet, little, spoiled child whose pretty ways fascinated the youthful David and whom, after her father's death he married, only to lose her again by death within a short period of time. Finally the sweetly gentle Agnes, who had been his good angel all along. To her he had confided his little love affairs, had been advised by her and now he came to realize that she had really been in his thoughts all the time. He marries her and finds the happiness that he sought.

In *Hammer und Amboss* Georg is inspired with his first real passion by Constanze, the beautiful, strange daughter of Malte von Zehren. She becomes ensnared in an intrigue with the young prince of Prora, and tired of her life at home, elopes with him, thus sealing her fate. His second love is Hermine, a sweet, pretty, spoiled maiden,<sup>2</sup> whom he had known when she was yet a child.<sup>3</sup> Georg's marriage to her is soon followed by her father's death and shortly after by her own. Georg finds the affairs of his father-in-law in a tangle. He, like Dora's father in *David Copperfield*, had posed as being rich, but, as it proves, leaves nothing. Finally Georg turns to the quiet, peaceful, serenely sweet Paula, whom he had made a confidante in his affair with Hermine and who encouraged him in it. He soon

<sup>2</sup> Hermine, however, develops into a woman who at least knows what she will, while Dora always remains a child.

<sup>3</sup> With Hermine as with Dora, attention is frequently drawn to her straw hat with blue ribbons and to her pet dog.

realizes that it is she whom he has loved from the first. He marries her<sup>4</sup> and is happy.

We might add that the family likeness between Fräulein Amalie Duff and Miss Julia Mills is unmistakable. Each is a confidante of the spoiled little girl, Hermine or Dora; each favors the suit of the hero, Georg or David; each is sentimental and has a decided inclination for highly extravagant and poetic phrase and quotation to characterize situations that arise in the love affairs of her precious ward.

Dickens' liking to portray certain criminal types may have awakened in *Spielhagen* an interest in such figures as Katzen-Caspar. The prison scene, too, in chapter 61 of *David Copperfield*, though widely divergent in purpose and effect from the series of pictures of prison life in *Hammer und Amboss* very possibly influenced *Spielhagen* to treat this subject. In each book it is a sociological study, though in *David Copperfield* the theme is treated satirically, and the wretched person of Mr. Creakle is not to be compared with the splendid, noble character of the Director von Zehren. Each director, however, had his peneological theory, and a humanitarian one. Creakle, with impractical and misplaced tenderness for men, particularly those "connected with a whole calendar of sins", laid stress on "the supreme comfort of the persons" and "their reduction to a wholesome state of mind, leading to contrition and repentance"; the Director von Zehren, blaming chiefly the constitution of present-day society, particularly its inequality, for the poor derelicts on the ocean of life, endeavored to inspire them with self-respecting manhood by showing confidence in them, though without the weak, sentimental belief of Creakle's system in their moral and religious professions.

Another interesting parallel is the depreciation of the lawyer and the legal profession. With Dickens this attitude requires no special proof. In *Spielhagen's Hammer und Amboss* we recall the absurdly pitiful figure of Justizrath Heckepfennig, an

<sup>4</sup> Paula like Agnes, has always watched anxiously over her father with an all-absorbing, self-sacrificing love.

arrant coward, buffoon, and self-important coxcomb; the stupidity of his "Conferent", Justizrat Bostelmann, or the smirking, self-complacent acquiescence of the Actuarius Unterwasser, or the overplus of cleverness of the attorney for the defense, Assessor Perleberg, who was "eine Welt zu gelehrt und scharfsinnig für mich (Georg), armen Teufel! Mit seinem Erstens und Zweitens hätte er eine Jury von Engeln gegen die Unschuld selbst einnehmen müssen, geschweige denn ein Collegium von Richtern, die durch ihn auf den Gedanken kamen, dass ein Mensch, der mit einem so ungeheueren Aufwand von Scharfsinn und Gelehrsamkeit verteidigt werden musste, notwendig ein grosser Verbrecher war". And this man "ist später eine grosse Fackel und Leuchte der Jurisprudenz geworden."

A comparison of the two works shows the employment of similar devices of characterization, for example that of attaching certain marked physical peculiarities of speech, appearance, or manner to the unique characters of the book. Dr. Snellius in *Hammer und Amboss* is seldom introduced without reference to his high pitched voice, resembling the crowing of a cock, which he ever tries to pitch lower to convince himself that he is really a human being; the rare old Süßmilch with his favorite phrase "Man hat nicht sieben Sinne wie ein Bär", "Sollte man nicht gleich zu einem Bären mit sieben Sinnen werden", or his "Da soll man doch einen Zahnstocher für ein Scheunentor ansehen". The attention of the reader is called again and again when Claus is present to his double row of the whitest of teeth; and poor, old, good-hearted Hans has his belief in the panaceic properties of the wine bottle held up before our minds with the emphasis of repetition.

Another element in Dicken's technique in *David Copperfield* is the conjuring up before his mind of a picture of a certain scene, event or person as it was in the past. Spielhagen develops this device and uses it in a more artistic and effective manner. One passage will suffice as an example of those of a more reflective nature, merely. "Von den Abendwolken fiel noch ein schwaches rosiges Licht in mein Gemach; in diesem rosigen

Lichte sehe ich den Mann immer, wenn ich an ihn denke. . . .  
 Und wenn ich die Augen schlosse, so würde er vor mir stehen,  
 wie er an jenem Abend vor mir stand, umflossen von dem rosigen  
 Licht, und nicht minder deutlich würde ich seine Stimme  
 hören". . . . .

This device, however, is made to assume its real value in such passages as the following: "Meine Abneigung gegen sie war von altem Datum und nur zu begründet! . . . . Die kleine Hermine freilich, hatte sie wohl noch so kornblumblaue Augen wie an jenem Morgen auf dem Deck des 'Pinguin'? und die sentenzenreiche Gouvernante, trug sie noch ihre gelben Locken? Es war ein lustiger, sonniger Tag gewesen, als ich die beiden zum letztenmale gesehen". . . . . "Während Christel so ihrem tiefen Kummer Worte gab, deckte sie zierlich und gewandt den Tisch und ich. . . . . dachte vergangener Zeiten, dachte jenes Abends, wo ich den Wilden in Pinnow's Schmiede zum ersten Mal getroffen und wie Christel den Tisch gedeckt und uns bedient und wie sie mich hernach gebeten hatte, nicht mit dem Wilden zu gehen. Wenn ich damals ihrem Rat gefolgt wäre!"

By means of such retrospects at different stages in the story, our minds are not permitted to release the impressions of the earlier incidents and the whole narrative affords a totality of impression that is hardly possible to attain in any other way.

We might close with a particularly striking and interesting parallel between two shipwreck scenes depicted by *Spielhagen* and *Dickens*. The first is found toward the end of the nineteenth and in the twentieth chapter of *Spielhagen's Noblesse Oblige*; the second in chapter fifty-five of *David Copperfield*. The underlying purpose of the scene, its place in the economy of the novel is much the same in both books. A chivalrous, noble-minded lover, Hipolyte in the one case, Ham in the other, loses his life in a vain attempt to rescue the man (Billow in the first passage, Steerforth in the second) who has robbed him of all he held dearest in the world, of his beloved.

<sup>1</sup> Hammer und Amboss I, 280-281.

<sup>2</sup> *Op. cit.* I, 396.

<sup>3</sup> II, 37; cf. also I, 231-232; 237; 417; 422; 423.

The setting of the two pictures is similar. A terrible storm has arisen, the wind sweeps through the town, roaring down the chimneys, banging the doors, and rattling the windows, hurling tiles from the roofs and shaking the houses to their very foundations. David in the one story has come to an inn in Yarmouth, where he has put up; Minna, Billow's wife and Hipolyte's sweetheart, has in the other just taken quarters in the inn at Warnesoe on the Baltic. Both try in vain to get some rest; their inward agitation matches that of the storm without and makes repose an impossibility. In both stories the excited groups of people are depicted as they stand gazing out to sea, and in each narrativ a ship is sighted in distress. Each ship has four men clinging to the remaining mast and finally only one, this one the man of all men that Hipolyte or Ham had reason to hate and despise. It is evident that neither ship can hold out much longer. An attempt is made to hold both rescuers back, David trying it in the one case, Minna in the other; but to no avail. David sees the bold swimmer, Ham, "rising with the hills and falling with the valleys and lost beneath the foam"; while Minna watches the little boat with its rescuing party "tossing on the breakers comb, sinking into an abyss of water, swept up again and then plunging down", until both draw near the ships. They are close alongside and the heroic struggles seem destined to be crowned with success, when a huge wave comes towering, rolling in and crushes down upon the ships and the rescuers, engulfing all in its cruel embrace. When it passes onward to the shore, only a few fragments of debris dancing on the waves give any sign of the fated ship that was.

Both heroes perish in the attempt, the one, Ham, in David Copperfield, is hauled in dead to the very feet of his friend David; the other, Hipolyte in *Noblesse Oblige*, is brought ashore, mortally wounded, in the boat of the pilot crew, only to expire in the arms of his sweetheart Minna.\*

\* In the above sketch I have traced the essential resemblances in the two passages. There are, as might be expected, many divergencies, incident on a difference of general plot as well as of locality.

Although the scene in *Noblesse Oblige* gives us a vivid and impressive picture of a storm and the horrors of a wreck at sea, it exhibits as a whole more pose, is more melodramatic than the picture in Dickens. In the latter passage the details are more fully and more skilfully handled. The scene is powerfully drawn and moves our sympathy deeply. We must bear in mind, however, that *Noblesse Oblige*, one of Spielhagens inferior novels, should not be compared artistically with Dickens' best work.

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